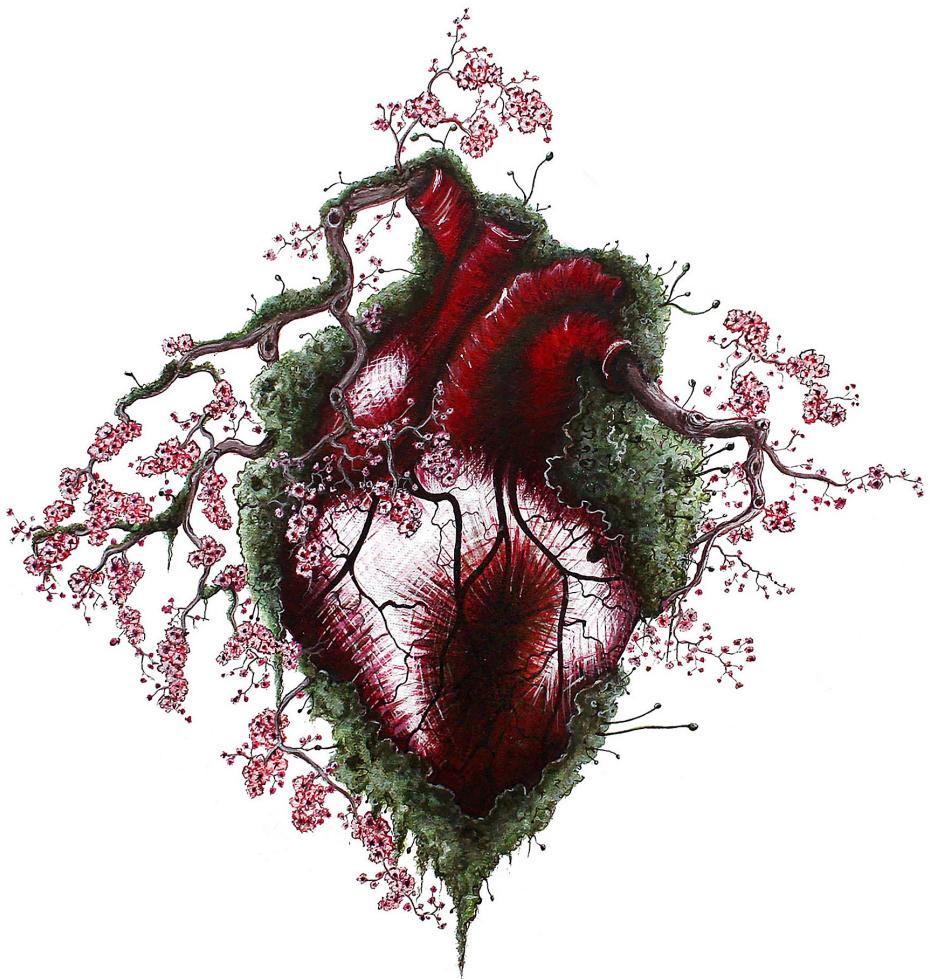


HEARTVINES



Poems, thoughts, and observations by Jay Sturner

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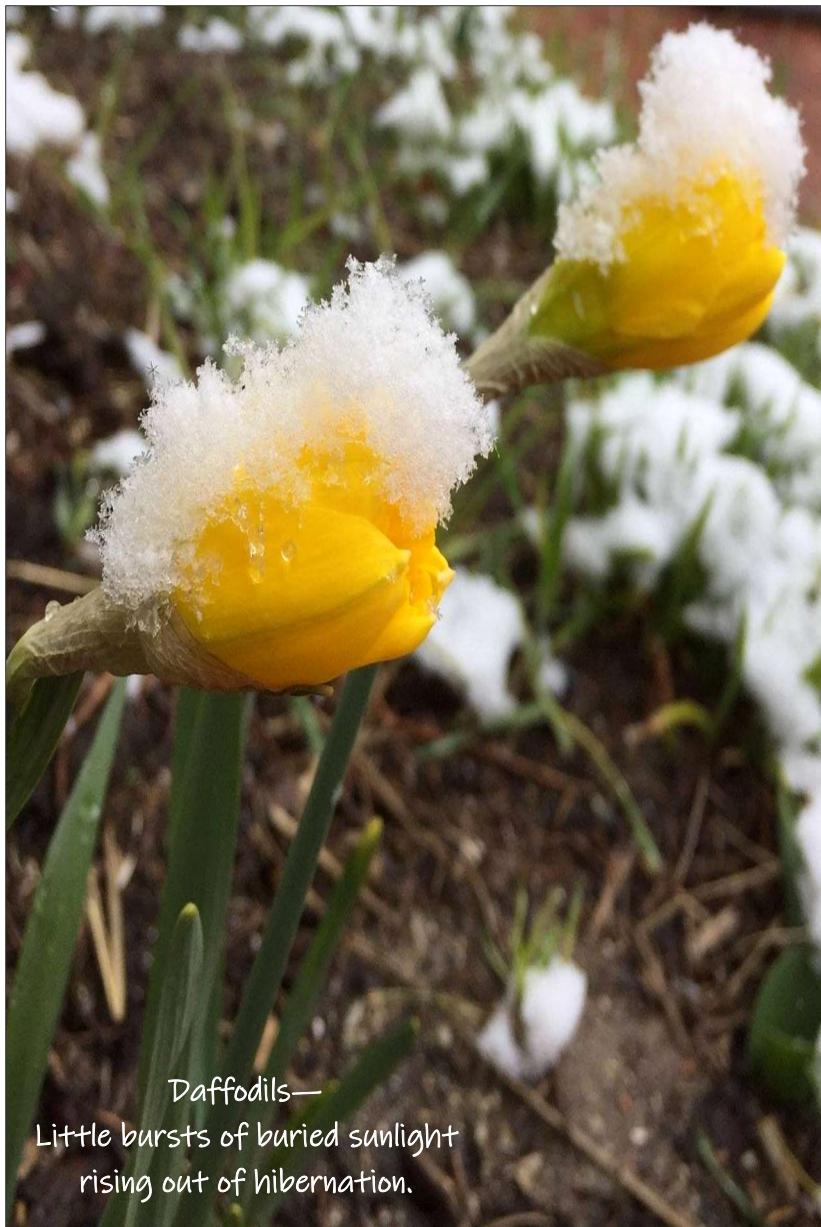
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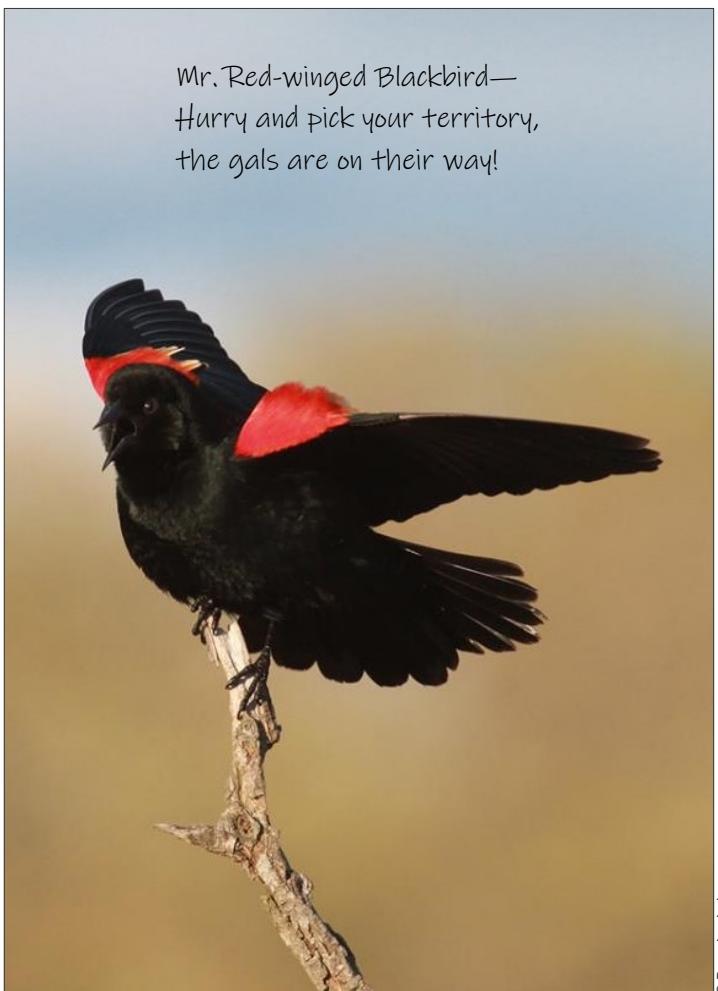
SPRING



Daffodils—
Little bursts of buried sunlight
rising out of hibernation.

© Scott Cohns

Mr. Red-winged Blackbird—
Hurry and pick your territory,
the gals are on their way!



© Brandon Lake

Brown-shaded Gray

I love when first-of-spring things mingle with last-of-winter things. This morning I've juncos, finches, and siskins zipping about the yard—birds of winter not quite ready to hit the breeding grounds. Beyond them, down in some wet spot in the woods, newly awakened chorus frogs cry out for mates. The mates will come, and an orgy will ensue—you can be sure of that. And then there are the less noticeable beauties (all around us, if we're looking) such as this Brown-shaded Gray, watching from the back deck as I go about my morning. Soon this cryptic moth will flutter off to do whatever it is such quiet, mysterious things do (probably sleep on a tree somewhere, if I know anything at all) and I'll be sorry to see him go. Thankfully he'll return at dusk—along with the bats and Barred Owls—when he and others like him cling to the house like little impermanent ornaments to bask in the artificial light.



© Ken Childs

The Ca'erpawah



In the rising warmth of the morning, while playing in the yard, my son Garion found a green caterpillar on the patio table. I offered it my finger—which it grabbed trustingly—and the two of us watched it crawl across my hand as if trying to make sense of the new landscape.

By now Garion was inside the curtain of the moment, trying to make sense, in his own way, of the odd squirt of life in my hand. All the while I told him what I knew of this “baby” insect, not so unlike himself—a small being on a singular quest for food and growth; a life destined to blossom into something amazing.

Time was spent passing the critter between hands of father and son (and once to and from our noses, which is funny for grown-up and toddler alike). I was glad for the opportunity to teach my son something new about nature, and more so for the lesson it afforded in compassion—for we were gentle with the larva, and never addressed it as a lesser thing, or called it “gross” when it pooped on my hand.

When it was time to let the caterpillar go, I carried it over to a nearby tree—the one I assumed it had come from—and carefully placed it on the lichen-encrusted bark. There it crawled into a shadowed furrow and lay still. “It’s napping,” I said quietly. And Garion, already familiar with naps, and by extension the colorful dreams which shower down upon them, leaned in close to his new friend and whispered, “Good night, ca’erpawah.”

Winter Wren

Such a little pop, a flare of dinosaur. Warmly brown. Curious, but no line-crosser; a blender-in. Life in small, tight spaces, condensed heavens (or eternal ones, if the fairies have their say). But back to wrens, to the feathered belly-laughs of children, bouncing and hide-and-seeking in rocky, mossy, fallen-log regions of the shadowy wood. Quiet places. Places passed over, underappreciated. Nearly forgotten if not for the presence and eternal song of the Winter Wren.



© Scott Somershoe

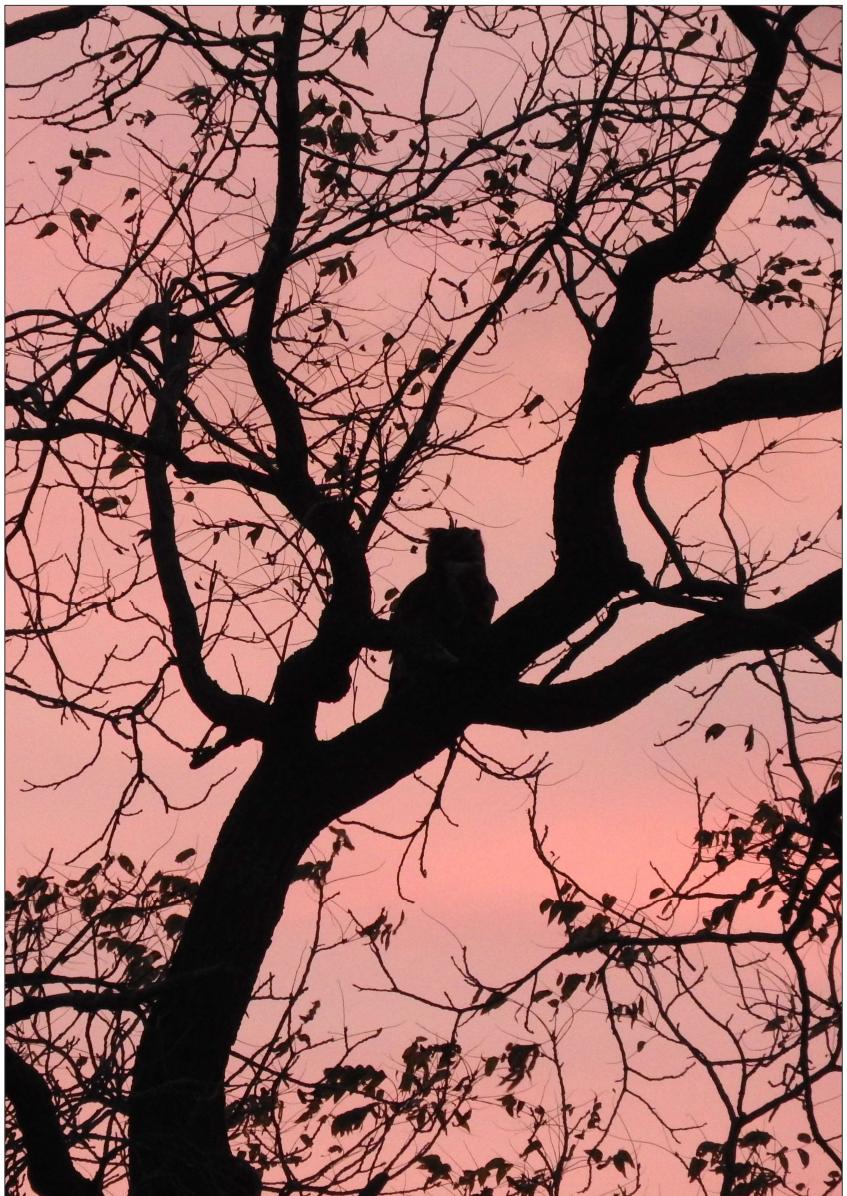
Foothills Parkway

As the sun lifts layers of mist off the morning hills, thrushes begin to stir in the woodlands. Mother Nature tosses handfuls of jewels across the yawning trees, bringing forth grosbeaks, tanagers, butterflies, and warblers. Later, as the sky turns its best blue, proud hawks and lazy vultures will join the wind in its dance over the waking valley. By then, I will have gone my own way.



© Jay Sturmer

SUMMER



© Walt Lutz

*All our indoor plugs and wires... they'll never replace
those glorious branches outside the window.*

In the Dawn

I could go on, but one likes to get back to such dawns before they're gone.

Wait, what is that? Hold a second...
The dawn has come up to the window.
Yes, in color and song it is saying

Into me
all of you are welcome
to take part.

At Every Level

by Jay Sturmer

Artwork by Garion Sturmer

Green comes in through the window:

The Magnolia, the maple,
A million blades of green grass.
And between the blades and leaves
There is life—unseen, busy life!

And now the sun breaks through the trees,
Spills across the yard.

The green is bright, the shadows restful.
Appreciate what you will,
There is beauty at every level.

One time, at a red light,
a dragonfly appeared in
front of my windshield.
For a few brief moments
it lingered there, carrying
sunlight on its back,
before zipping away.



© Dean Turley

Prothonotary Warbler at Dawn

Up from the riverbank,
through the low leaves,
a tiny sun rises, reflected
in drops of morning dew.



© Julie Long

Common Yellowthroat at Dusk

Sunlight flows out
like a tide...
A blade of prairie grass
arcs
to
earth
beneath a black-and-yellow shape.

Witchity, witchity, witchity...

Tiny bandit skulks
through day's ending light.



© Graham Gerdeman

A two-year-old Garion visits my poem at The Morton Arboretum.



© Susan Sturmer

A Tree

A tree
is a treasure burst forth into the sky;
a fissured relic covered in emeralds
that change with the voice of equinox.

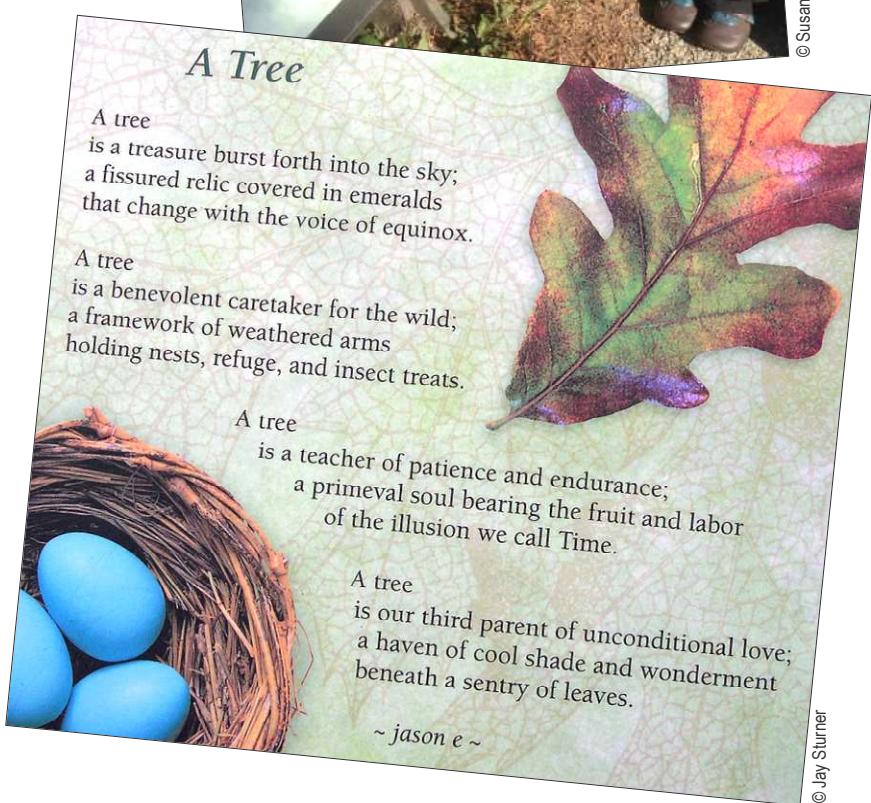
A tree
is a benevolent caretaker for the wild;
a framework of weathered arms
holding nests, refuge, and insect treats.



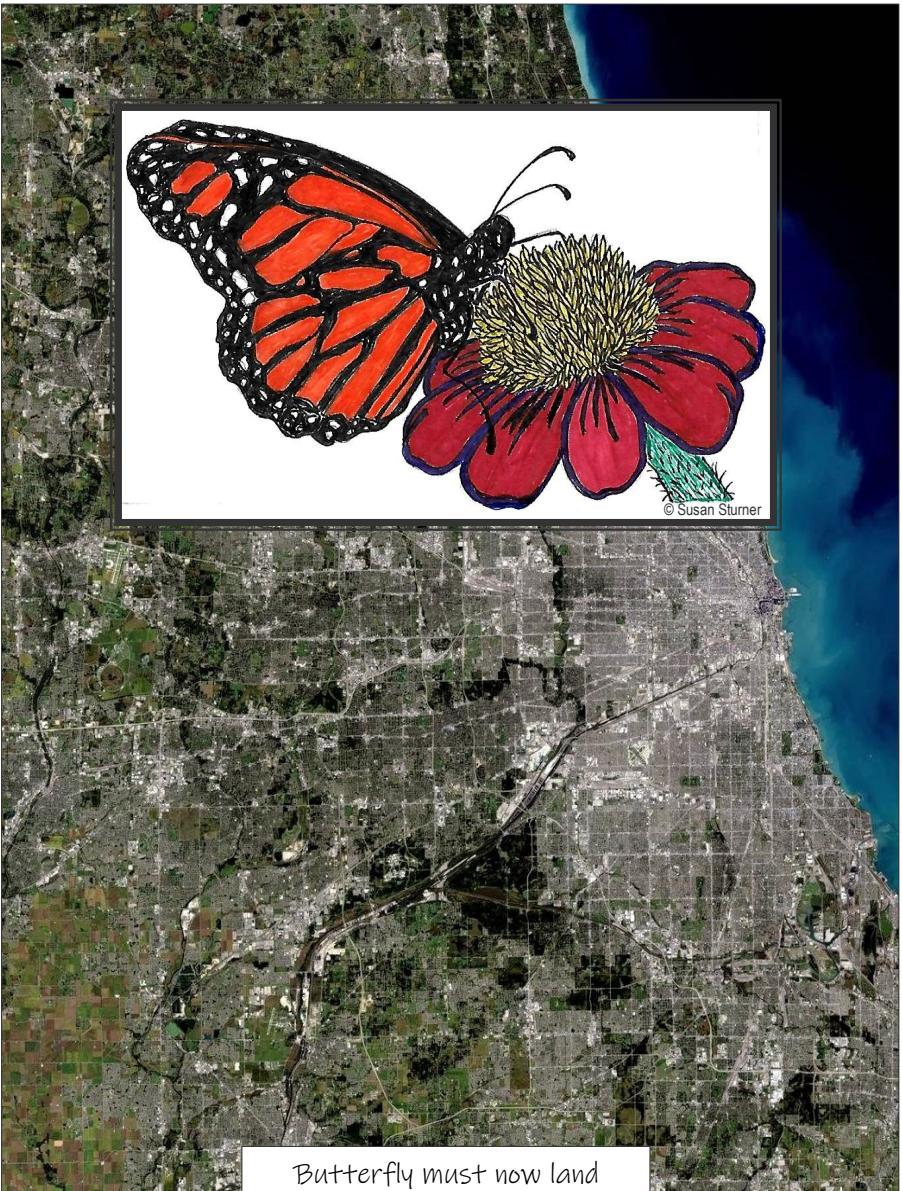
A tree
is a teacher of patience and endurance;
a primeval soul bearing the fruit and labor
of the illusion we call Time.

A tree
is our third parent of unconditional love;
a haven of cool shade and wonderment
beneath a sentry of leaves.

~ jason e ~



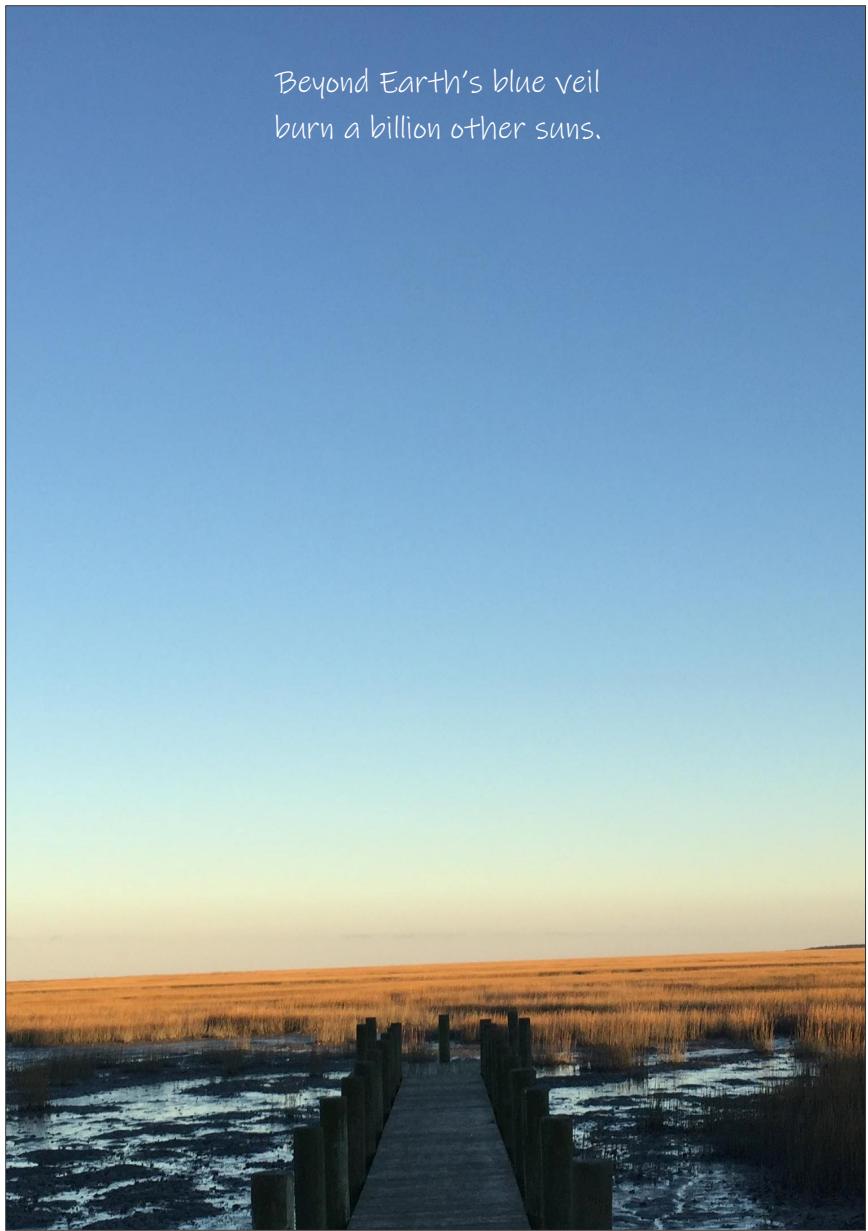
© Jay Sturmer



Butterfly must now land
in a world where man
turns nature's green to gray.

AUTUMN

Beyond Earth's blue veil
burn a billion other suns.



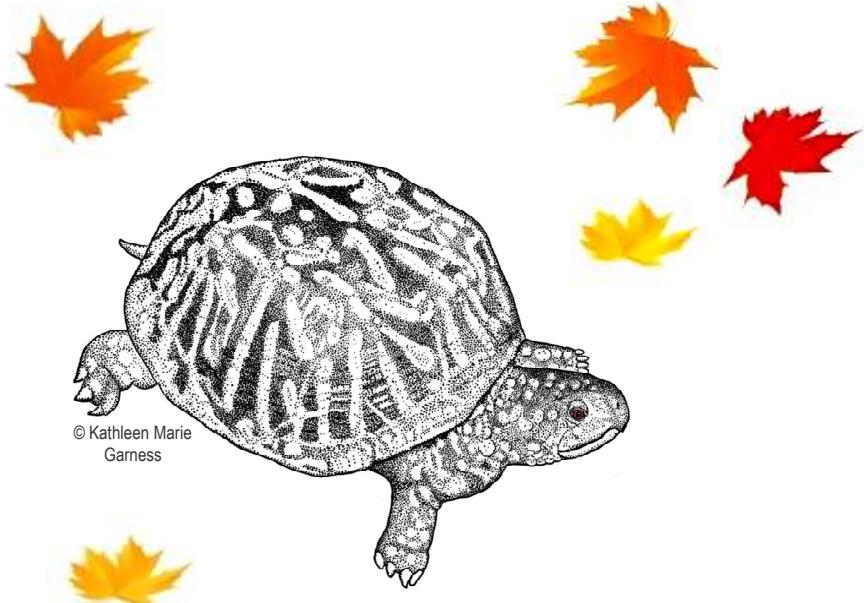
© Shanin Abeu

A Moment in the Forest

The wind blowing through the treetops reminds me of crashing waves on a distant sea; leaves blowing down the trail resemble skittering crabs. High overhead, the clouds swirl like cream in a magnificent cup of tea, while nearby a box turtle follows my heel with his ruby eye.



© Christopher Collins



© Kathleen Marie
Garness

Hermit Thrush

Hermit Thrush—
So old, so wise; so
rooted in earth's antiquity
she's already gone rust
from bottom up.



© Jason Newton

All the Good of the World

This morning a Hermit Thrush returned to our yard for the season. I heard it—skreeee!—as Garion set off on a mini-quest for rocks and acorns. A falling leaf—russet, corner-curled, emptied of summer's light—floated soundlessly over G's tiny shoulder. Hands in pockets, I stood listening to the harvest-time voice of my favorite bird, and watched as my son absorbed all the good of the world.

And then it started to rain. Indoor creatures we became, once again: our human habitat within windows and walls, a cozy jungle of wired distractions... but with plenty of toys, books, and music, too. More good things of the world!

Outside I imagined the thrush flicking rain off its wings, its body perfumed by a northern forest of hemlock while engaged in a mini-quest for bugs and berries. Though shy, hidden, and non-existent to most, this feathered thing is no less important, or needed, in life. It, too, is part of all the good of the world. Something my little man will one day come to know.



© Jay Sturmer



© Jimmy Tucker

Ruffed Grouse

Not all leaves of orange or brown
fall to earth in eternal sleep;
a few rally and rise again
to form the lovely grouse.

Brown Creeper

For those who seek their charm.

And your day was going
only okay,
as you expected it would stay.
Then Brown Creeper came along—
cryptic, petite—
and spiraled, herky-jerky, up and around
your fogged-up heart.
And suddenly heart, and soul—
both clear—were better than okay:
They were
realigned.



© Adam Wilson

WINTER



© Glenn Perricone Jr.

Some memories are scars, others are feathers for flight.



© Jay Sturmer

I want to be...

I want to be that junco on the powdering of snow beneath the pine. I want this cup of hot chocolate to last forever. When I opened the kitchen window a bunch of snowflakes blew in, and one got caught in a spider web. I want to believe in magic; I want to have faith that our plush tomte will keep us safe from harm. The blue-gray days of the season are closing in. I want the strength to slay a waking demon or two. Hope is found in the web of winter stars.

Untitled 1 In the pitch black of the future there materialized a pair of eyes—small, childlike eyes void of the slightest hint of judgment. And they didn't look at me so much as past me, focusing on the present state of things and the goings-on all around. Suddenly I was aware I'd failed to do my best, like so many others in our time (yes, there is progress, but that is not to be dwelled upon when there is so much more at stake). And then those eyes, grown familiar, began to glisten and harden and fade into the lightless beyond. And I was left in silence.

Just a dream? My imagination? It doesn't matter. What matters is the messenger. Because the eyes were those of my son. And they were the eyes of every child alive and every child to come. And if I'm to truly realize the potential of my humanity, to let rise the best version of myself, then I must apply the change that occurred in me at the moment those eyes departed. Because it wasn't just disappointment that I saw in them, it was a smothering of innocence.

And to me, that is unforgivable.



© Bryan Davis

Starling (January 30, 2019)

Negative twenty-three degrees. Birds puffed up and deliberate. I watch the feeders from my window, safe, but concerned. What survived the night has a long fight ahead, an ancient struggle as pure as the arctic snow. Today, I harbor no disdain for the non-native starling—that single, disoriented bird I saw fumble across the snow, losing its wild symmetry.



© Bill Ahlgren

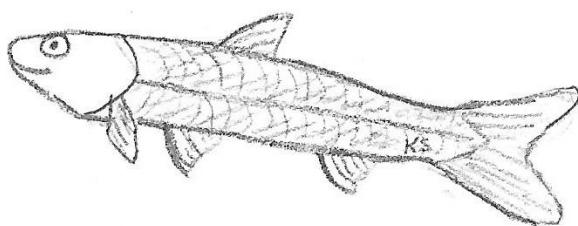
Tempering the World's Chaos

Snow rests heavy upon the dim blue landscape, tracing and draping myriad outlines. Branches droop in repose as juncos dash through wild-haired shrubs. The waking mind is coaxed into a slow wandering—silence the treasured vehicle. The serenity placates, perhaps medicates. We inhale what we can of it, for morning quickly smothers the predawn hour. Soon it will heave jewels of sunlight across the white blanket, shrinking blue shadows like summer puddles. Snow drips and falls to the warming wet earth. We begin to stir within the transition, lured by its guiding hand. Soon our thoughts will speed, looping, toward the waking day. Routine will take hold. But before we step too far into the busyness, let us sit, selfishly, with one more cherished thought of a loved one, near or somewhere far; or the soft gray juncos, chasing and chattering like lovers' hearts; or a path along a bookshelf, all those soul-building stories and poems; or something else, anything else, to help temper the world's chaos.



© Jay Stumer

End of winter:
Impatient minnow
in a thawing pond.



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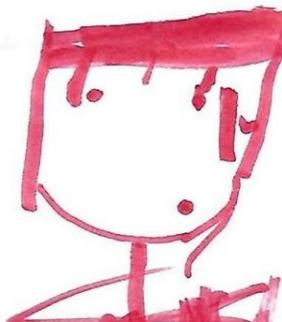
European Starling, p. 22, © Bill Ahlgren

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HEARTVINES is a limited edition chapbook of poetic writings about nature, the seasons, and the author's time spent outdoors with his young son. At times light-hearted, at other times serious, this new chapbook—which is embellished with art and photos from Sturner's family and friends—will take the reader on a journey as only a poet can.

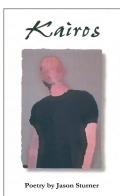
About the Author:

Naturalist and writer Jay Sturner has been publishing poems and stories for over twenty years in magazines, newspapers, and online periodicals. He is the author of several books of poetry; a collection of his short stories is forthcoming. In his spare time Jay leads bird walks at The Morton Arboretum in Lisle, Illinois and in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. He lives in Downers Grove, Illinois with his wife and son.



Accurate image of the author
by Garion Sturner.

Other books by Jay Sturner:



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